

# Chapter Four – Environmental Consequences

## Introduction

Given that the proposed plan is designed to provide disposal criteria and not specific decisions about each parcel, the impact assessment will be general in nature. Until BLM receives applications and plans of development for individual parcels, a detailed environmental assessment (EA) under the guidance of the National Environmental Policy Act is impractical and would be highly imprecise. In-depth EAs will be conducted when BLM gets applications for individual parcels.

### ALTERNATIVE ONE – TRANSFER FROM BLM ADMINISTRATION

#### Lighthouses

The level of impact of transferring the lighthouses to non-BLM entities would depend on the type of development proposed by a prospective land manager.

*Eagle Bluff:* It is unlikely that there will be any significant change in use and management, so new impacts are considered negligible.

*Plum Island:* Under this alternative, BLM could authorize a wide variety of uses or place significant restrictions on the use of the island. Conceivably, the island could be used as an interpretative center for Great Lakes maritime history; as a rustic or developed State Park campground, as a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, or could be closed to public access in some parts of the island to protect cultural or other resources. It is also possible for all of these uses could occur in some form.

The impact of transferring the island would largely depend on what the land would be used for. Impacts that may result from transferring the property to another entity and allowing public access to the island include fuel and lubricant leaks from vessels using the nearshore waters, vandalism of historic properties or theft of artifacts, and loss of critical habitat, including that for threatened and endangered species or migratory birds.

*Pilot Island:* Unlike Plum Island no development proposals for Pilot Island were presented during the planning process. It is unlikely that the island could support much development or use. In the absence of financial support that could be generated by development, it is not likely that the lighthouse/keepers quarters could be maintained. In addition, the lack of an on-the-ground presence could result in illegal collection or destruction of cultural resources, both on the island and off-shore in the area with shipwrecks.

*Cana Island:* Many of the impacts associated with transferring the Cana Island lighthouse depend on how traffic and access is managed. Currently, the Door County Maritime Museum conducts an interpretative program and operates a small shop out of the lighthouse. Even with such a relatively small operation in terms of personnel and interpretative facilities

thousands of people visit the island annually. These numbers could increase if the island were transferred to a new landowner who could develop long-term development and marketing plans.

Under the disposal criteria outlined in Chapter One, BLM will require a transportation/access plan from prospective land managers. That plan, coupled with a development plan for the entire island, will forecast use levels and how this use will be accommodated with minimal impact to local residents and the surrounding environment.

Some of the ideas presented by parties interested in Cana Island include creating an off-site parking area away from the turnaround, or purchasing private land adjacent to the turnaround and converting it to a parking facility. Off-site parking could either be in Baileys Harbor or a nearby unspecified tract of land. It has been suggested that from the off-site parking area, visitors would be taken by bus to the turnaround at the end of Cana Island Road.

In the EA for any Cana Island proposal, the National Environmental Policy Act requires that BLM look at both on- and off-site impacts. On-site impacts are defined as those which would occur on the Cana Island; off-site impacts are those impacts that would occur away from the island but would be directly linked to the proposed action.

The requirement that all prospective landowners lay out how they intend to reduce parking along Cana Island Road and move people to and from the lighthouse will alleviate the current situation in which visitors to the lighthouse have overcrowded the road and created other impacts to the neighborhood.

Regardless of the specific management program at any of the lighthouses, environmental impacts would be related to the following factors:

- Ground disturbing activities;
- Traffic and parking (Cana Island);
- Access (e.g., docking facilities at Plum and Pilot Islands);
- Onsite sanitary systems.

These factors may affect cultural resources, endangered species, neighbors' peaceful use and enjoyment of their property, and the local economy and tax base. Some possible short-term impacts could include equipment and vehicle noise, soil compaction and erosion in the area of any proposed construction, additional traffic for construction equipment, and the loss of some vegetation.

As noted in Chapter One, BLM cannot accept jurisdiction over properties contaminated by hazardous materials. BLM acknowledges, however, that until the lighthouse properties are transferred to permanent, long-term owners, the condition of the historic buildings will deteriorate. The recent re-roofing of the keepers quarters on Plum Island by the Coast Guard will stabilize the building, but it is unknown how much damage has already occurred and whether the foundation was structurally compromised. It is reasonable to believe that other historic lighthouse buildings and the dock on Plum Island will face a similar fate until final disposition is effected.

## **Upland Tracts**

Lands in this category are divided into two subsets: rejected color-of-title (COT) claims and parcels without title conflicts. In some instances, BLM will consider selling the rejected COT parcels to the previous claimant. In cases where a COT claim is rejected for resource protection reasons, BLM will pursue transfer to another government entity or non-profit group to protect the resources. These situations will be considered and analyzed on a case-by-case basis.

Because these diverse scenarios could result in development (or private ownership at a minimum) or where the land would remain undeveloped, potential impacts vary greatly. In general, however, if the land goes into private ownership, BLM would have no control over management of the property. Local (county) zoning ordinances would be controlling. Shoreline setbacks would mitigate most visual and sanitary impacts to shorelands and water bodies, respectively. There could be a loss of vegetation, or increased soil erosion or household chemical use (pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, etc.)

Impacts to cultural resources, threatened or endangered species or wetlands would be mitigated by BLM's consultations prior to a decision to sell a parcel. For example, BLM will conduct archaeological site surveys to identify the scope and significance of cultural resources before taking action to sell any property. If these surveys reveal that the land is potentially eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, it would be unlikely that the property would be transferred from Federal ownership.

## **ALTERNATIVE TWO – NO ACTION**

### **Lighthouses**

Under this alternative, BLM would not act on transferring the lighthouse parcels to other entities, but would maintain the properties under custodial management. This would likely result in some short- and long-term impacts.

Cana Island and Eagle Bluff, which currently are open to the public would be closed. This would result in a loss of tourist activity in and around the adjacent communities. BLM assumes Baileys Harbor (Cana Island) would suffer a larger loss of tourism than the communities adjacent to Eagle Bluff because the latter is within a major state park, which is a much larger pull than the lighthouse alone. Information on how much money directly attributable to tourists visiting the Cana Island Lighthouse is spent in Baileys Harbor is not currently available.

Even if BLM were to perform minimal maintenance the buildings would inevitably deteriorate. Because the properties would appear to be abandoned, vandalism to structures and other cultural resources could occur. It is unlikely BLM could budget funds to perform maintenance activities, especially if the property is closed to the public.

Some traffic and parking problems along Cana Island Road would likely continue, although at a lower level because the lighthouse would no longer be marketed as a tourist destination.

### **Upland Parcels**

The lack of an on-the-ground presence on these parcels could result in illegal trespass and camping. As the properties would remain in Federal ownership there would be a continued loss to county tax. Finally, BLM would be unable to approve utility rights-of-way or other management activities. That could mean that adjacent landowners may be unable to place utility lines across or beneath the shortest and cheapest route if that happened to be Federal land.

## **ALTERNATIVE THREE – RETAIN/ACTIVE MANAGEMENT BY BLM**

### **Lighthouses**

The restoration of the lighthouses, development and operation of interpretative and historic facilities, and transportation to and from the facilities would fall to the BLM under this alternative. Impacts would be similar to Alternative One. Because BLM does not have a current plan on how to actively manage lighthouses, it is impossible to specify what these impacts would be.

If provided for in the site-specific implementation plans, BLM could issue leases to other parties to manage the structures and/or lands. Impacts to cultural, threatened and endangered wildlife and plant species, wetlands and the economic effect would depend on BLM's management program. The Bureau would be required to meet the same standards set forth in the disposal criteria as any other prospective land manager and would also have to conduct all applicable consultations.

### **Upland Parcels**

Impacts would vary depending on the type of management program BLM undertakes for these tracts. For those properties that are under color-of-title application, taxes have likely been paid, a situation which would change after BLM takes over the land. The Federal government would compensate localities with payments in lieu of taxes (PILT), albeit at a level lower than the property tax rate. The difference between the two payments would be the economic impact. On the other hand, BLM might develop the properties; for example as a recreation site, which may create a positive economic impact to the local economy.

Natural resource impacts are more difficult to measure because it is unknown the nature and scope of development, if any, that would occur on the properties. Currently, most of the upland tracts are undeveloped or are being used non-intensively (e.g., pasture lands, tree lots, or as hunting grounds). BLM might choose to develop some or all of the tracts for primitive or semi-primitive motorized recreation (e.g., all terrain vehicles, snowmobiles). This type of activity would create a larger impact.

## **Socioeconomics**

Given the enormity Wisconsin's gross state product and that of the Great Lakes region, implementation of any of the alternatives would have negligible economic impacts on the State and the region as a whole. Local economic impacts may be more pronounced as long-term, permanent ownership of the lighthouse parcels, for example, and their lessees result in more intensive management of the properties. Examples of such management include improvements to tourist facilities, infrastructure, and other management activities.

Because the nature and extent of these activities are unknown, it is impossible to determine the economic impacts of either Alternative One or Three. Under either alternative, the economic benefits would be similar.

Under Alternative Two (no action), economic impact would be restricted to the loss of economic opportunities and some tax revenues. No large-scale restoration could occur at the lighthouses, which may result in some loss of construction jobs; however, minimal maintenance on the buildings would take place.<sup>1</sup> There would be an indeterminate loss of revenue generated by tourist activity. Similarly, the slow deterioration of the lighthouses would be a loss to society as a whole, which has placed a high value on preserving objects of its cultural heritage.

## **Other Resources**

When appropriate in its land use plans, BLM is required to:

- Identify lands open, closed or open subject to no surface occupancy stipulations to mineral leasing;
- Identify impacts to native vegetation and whether BLM's actions will exacerbate a noxious weed problem;
- Identify special recreation management areas;
- Identify right-of way corridors and avoidance and exclusion areas; and
- Identify areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs).

See page 15 for a discussion on these subjects. If BLM were to retain a parcel, a plan amendment would be necessary to consider whether to designate it an ACEC.

Because the tracts are small and isolated, it was determined that minerals could not be economically developed. Wisconsin does not have any known fluid mineral deposits. BLM will consider, on a case-by-case basis whether to sell the mineral rights to surface owners (if they are non-Federal entities) under the authority of FLPMA, Sec. 209.

## **Residual Impacts**

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<sup>1</sup> Most restoration projects undertaken by not-for-profit groups are done by volunteers and through in-kind donation of materials and machinery.

The NEPA regulations require agencies to identify impacts after all reasonable mitigation has been applied. Because we do not have specific proposals for any of the parcels, we have not, in general, identified or analyzed specific mitigation measures.

The NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500 et seq.) do not distinguish between negative and positive impacts. Thus, BLM could take an action that results in additional jobs (related to the restoration and operation of the lighthouses, for example) or increased tax revenue to local governments (public sale of Federal lands). The scope and extent of these potentially positive impacts cannot be gauged now. It can be stated with reasonable assurance, however, that some positive impact — both economic and environmental — could occur as a result of choosing either Alternative One or Three. There would be no residual positive impacts related to Alternative Two (no action).

Negative impacts related to Alternative Two would be the lack of on-the-ground management oversight on the scattered upland parcels. The lighthouses would be maintained on a custodial basis, which would leave the potential for vandalism, deterioration of the buildings, the loss of opportunity for interpreting maritime and natural history on the lighthouse parcels and a small loss in local sales tax revenue.

If Alternative One is chosen, residual negative impacts could include some loss of vegetation on those parcels that go into private ownership.<sup>2</sup> For parcels transferred to other governmental entities, only minimal vegetation loss is contemplated; site-specific impacts may vary.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) defines cumulative impacts in 40 CFR 1508.7 as the impact:

[w]hich results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

The potential for cumulative impacts under the actions proposed in the proposed plan would be restricted to local impacts. It may be possible that the transfer of a BLM tract or group of tracts could trigger an unanticipated impact. For example, the transfer of all four lighthouses

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<sup>2</sup> It is possible that one or more of these parcels could be sold with a conservation easement attached. This would restrict owners from developing the land, although it would still be possible to maintain the property.

could spur a significant increase in the number of tourists to Door County, which would strain local roads and other infrastructure. It is unlikely given the level of development envisioned by the alternatives and constrained by the disposal criteria that such a synergy would occur. However, cumulative impacts will be considered in the site-specific environmental assessments.